A

Seasonable New-Years-Gift.

A

SERMON

Preach'd at *White-Hall, &c.*

1 Cor. III. 15.

But he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire.

THE Context is thus. *According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise Master-Builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon: but let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay, than that which is laid, Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble, every mans work shall be made manifest, for the day shall declare it; because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every mans work of what sort it is. If any mans work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any mans work shall be burnt, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire.*

In these words the Apostle speaks of a sort of persons, who held indeed the foundation of *Christianity*, but built upon it such *doctrines* or *practices* as would not bear the *trial*; which he expresses to us by *wood*, *hay*, and *stubble*, which are not *proof* against the *fire*. Such a person, the Apostle tells us, hath brought himself into a very dangerous state, though he would not deny the possibility of his Salvation: *He himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire.*

That by *fire* here is not meant the fire of *Purgatory*, as some pretend (who would be glad of any shadow of a Text of Scripture to countenance their own dreams) I shall neither trouble you nor my self to manifest; since the *particle* of similitude [ὡς] plainly shews that the Apostle did not intend an escape out of the fire *literally*, but like to that which men make out of a House or Town that is on fire. Especially since very learned persons of the Church of *Rome* do acknowledge that *Purgatory* cannot be concluded from this *Text*, nay all that *Estius* contends for from this *place* is, that it cannot be concluded from hence that there is no *Purgatory*, which we never pretended; but only that this Text does not prove it.

It is very well known that this is a Proverbial phrase used not only in Scripture, but in prophane Authors to signifie *a narrow escape out of a great danger*. He shall be saved, yet so as by fire, διὰ πυρὸς, *out of the fire*. Just as διὰ ὕδατος is used, 1 Pet. 3. 20. where the Apostle speaking of the eight persons of *Noah's* family who escaped the flood, διεσώθησαν διὰ ὕδατος, they escaped *out of the water*. So here this phrase is to be rendred in the Text, *he himself shall escape, yet so as out of the fire*. The like expression you have, *Am.* 4. 11. *I have pluckt them as a firebrand out of the fire*. And *Jude* 23, *Others save with fear, plucking them out of the fire*. All which expressions signifie the greatness of the danger and the difficulty

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of escaping it; *as one who when his house at midnight is set on fire, and being suddenly wak'd, leaps out of his bed, and runs naked out of the doors, taking nothing that is within along with him, but employing his whole care to save his body from the Flames, as* St. *Chrysostom* upon another occasion expresseth it. And so the *Roman* Orator* (who, it is likely did not think of *Purgatory*) useth this Phrase; *Quo ex judicio, velut ex incendio, nudus effugit*; From which judgement or Sentence he escaped naked, as it were out of a burning. And one of the *Greek* Orators* tells us, That *to save a man out of the fire, was a common proverbial speech.*

* *Tully.*

* Aristides.

From the words thus explained, the Observation that naturally ariseth is this, *That men may hold all the Fundamentals of Christian Religion, and yet may superadd other things whereby they may greatly endanger their Salvation.* What those things were which some among the *Corinthians* built upon the foundation of Christianity, whereby they endangered their Salvation, we may probably conjecture by what the Apostle reproves in this Epistle, as the tolerating of *incestuous marriages*, communicating in *Idol-feasts*, &c. And especially by the Doctrine of the false Apostles, who at that time did so much disturb the peace of most Christian Churches, and who are so often and so severely reflected upon in this Epistle. And what their *Doctrine* was, we have an account, *Act.* 15. *viz.* that they imposed upon the *Gentile* Christians *Circumcision, and the observation of the Jewish Law*, teaching that *unless they were circumcised, and kept the Law of* Moses, *they could not be saved.* So that they did not only build these doctrines upon *Christianity*, but they made them equal with the *Foundation*, saying, that *unless men believed and practised such things, they could not be saved.*

In ſpeaking to this *Obſervation*, I ſhall reduce my Diſcourſe to theſe two Heads.

1. I ſhall preſent to you ſome *Doctrines* and *Practices* which have been built upon the *Foundation of Chriſtianity*, to the great hazard and danger of mens *ſalvation*. And to be plain, I mean particularly the Church of *Rome*.

2. I ſhall enquire, whether our granting a *poſſibility* of ſalvation (tho with great hazard) to thoſe in the Communion of the *Roman* Church, and their denying it to us, be a reaſonable argument and encouragement to any man to betake himſelf to that Church.

And there is the more reaſon to conſider theſe things, when ſo many *ſeducing Spirits* are ſo active and buſie to pervert men from the *truth*; and when we ſee every day ſo many men and their *Religion* ſo eaſily parted. For this reaſon theſe two Conſiderations ſhall be the ſubject of the following diſcourſe.

I. *Firſt*. We will conſider ſome *Doctrines* and *Practices* which the Church of *Rome* hath built upon the *Foundation* of *Chriſtianity*, to the great hazard and danger of mens *ſalvation*. It is not denyed by the moſt judicious *Proteſtants*, but that the Church of *Rome* do hold all the Articles of the Chriſtian Faith, which are neceſſary to ſalvation. But that which we charge upon them, as a juſt ground of our ſeparation from them, is, *the impoſing of new Doctrines and practices upon Chriſtians as neceſſary to ſalvation*, which were never taught by our Saviour, or his Apoſtles; and which are either directly contrary to the doctrine of Chriſtianity, or too apparently deſtructive of a good life. And I begin

1. With their *Doctrines*. And becauſe I have no mind to aggravate leſſer matters, I will ſingle out four or five points of Doctrine, which they have added to the Chriſtian Religion, and which were neither taught

taught by our Saviour and his Apostles, nor own'd in the first Ages of Christianity. And the

First which I shall mention, and which being once admitted, makes way for as many errors as they please to bring in, is their *Doctrine of Infallibility.* And this they are very stiff and peremptory in, though they are not agreed among themselves where this *Infallibility* is seated; whether in the Pope *alone*, or a *Council alone*, or in *both together*, or in the *diffusive body of Christians.* But they are sure they have it, though they know not where it is.

And is this no prejudice against it? can any man think that this *priviledge* was at first conferred upon the Church of *Rome*, and that Christians in all Ages did believe it, and had constant recourse to it for determining their differences, and yet that that very Church which hath enjoyed and used it so long should now be at a loss where to find it? Nothing could have fallen out more unluckily, than that there should be such differences among them about that which they pretend to be the only means of ending all differences.

There is not the least intimation in Scripture of this *priviledge* conferr'd upon the *Roman* Church, nor do the Apostles, in all their Epistles, ever so much as give the least direction to Christians to appeal to the Bishop of *Rome* for a determination of the many differences which even in those times happened among them: And it is strange they should be so silent in this matter, when there were so many *occasions* to speak of it, if our Saviour had plainly appointed such an *infallible Judge* of controversies for this very end to decide the differences that should happen among Christians. It is strange that the *ancient Fathers* in their disputes with Hereticks should never appeal to this *Judge*; nay, it is strange they should not constantly do it in all cases, it being so short and expedite a way for the ending of controversies. And this very

consideration to a wise man is instead of a thousand arguments to satisfie him, that in those times no such thing was believed in the world.

Now this *Doctrine of Infallibility*, if it be not true, is of so much the more pernicious consequence to Christianity, because the conceit of it does confirm them that think they have it in all their other errors, and gives them a pretence of assuming an Authority to themselves to impose their own fancies and mistakes upon the whole Christian World.

2. Their *Doctrine* about *Repentance*, which consists in confessing their sins to the Priest; which if it be but accompanyed with any degree of *contrition*, does, upon *absolution* received from the Priest, put them into a state of *salvation*, though they have lived the most lewd and debauched lives that can be imagin'd; than which nothing can be more plainly destructive of a good life. For if this be true, all the hazard that the most wicked man runs of his salvation is only the danger of so *sudden a death* as gives him no space for confession and absolution. A case that happens so rarely, that any man that is strongly addicted to his lusts will be content to venture his salvation upon this hazard; and all the arguments to a good life will be very insignificant to a man that hath a mind to be wicked, when remission of sins may be had upon such cheap terms.

3. The *Doctrine of Purgatory*; by which they mean an estate of temporary punishments after this life, from which men may be released and translated into Heaven by the prayers of the living, and the sacrifice of the *Mass*. That this Doctrine was not known in the primitive Church, nor can be proved from Scripture, we have the free acknowledgement of as learned and eminent men as any of that Church; which is to acknowledge that it is a superstructure upon the Christian Religion. And though in one sense it be

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indeed a building of *Gold* and *Silver* upon the foundation of Chriſtianity, conſidering the vaſt revenues which this Doctrine (and that of Indulgences, which depends upon it) brings into that Church; yet I doubt not, but in the Apoſtles ſenſe, it will be found to be *hay* and *ſtubble*. But how groundleſs ſoever it be, it is too gainful a Doctrine to be eaſily parted withal.

4. The *Doctrine* of *Tranſubſtantiation*. A hard *word*, but I would to God that were the worſt of it; the *thing* is much more difficult. I have taken ſome pains to conſider other Religions that have been in the world, and I muſt freely declare, that I never yet in any of them met with any Article or Propoſition, impoſed upon the belief of men, half ſo unreaſonable and hard to be believed as this is: And yet this in the *Romiſh* Church is eſteem'd one of the moſt principal Articles of the Chriſtian Faith; though there is no more certain foundation for it in Scripture, then for our Saviour's being ſubſtantially changed into all thoſe things which are ſaid of him, as that he is a *rock*, a *vine*, a *door*, and a hundred other things.

But this is not all. This Doctrine hath not only *no certain foundation* in Scripture, but I have a far heavier charge againſt it, namely, that it undermines the very foundation of Chriſtianity it ſelf. And ſurely nothing ought to be admitted to be a part of the *Chriſtian Doctrine* which deſtroys the reaſon of our belief of the whole. And that this Doctrine does ſo, will appear evidently, if we conſider what was the main argument which the Apoſtles uſed to convince the world of the *truth of Chriſtianity*; and that was this, *That our Bleſſed Saviour, the Author of this Doctrine, wrought ſuch and ſuch miracles, and particularly that he roſe again from the dead:* And this they proved becauſe they were eye-witneſſes of his miracles, and had ſeen him and converſed with him after he was riſen from the dead. But what if their ſenſes did deceive them

in this matter? then it cannot be denyed but that the main proof of Christianity falls to the ground.

Well! We will now suppose (as the Church of *Rome* does) *Transubstantiation* to have been one principal part of the Christian Doctrine which the Apostles preached. But if this Doctrine be true, then all mens senses are deceived in a plain sensible matter, wherein 'tis as hard for them to be deceived as in any thing in the world: For two things can hardly be imagined more different, than a *little bit* of wafer, and the *whole body* of a man.

So that the Apostle perswading men to believe this Doctrine, perswaded them not to trust their senses, and yet the argument which they used to perswade them to this was built upon the direct contrary principle, that mens *senses are to be trusted.* For if they be not, then notwithstanding all the evidence the Apostles offer'd for the Resurrection of our Saviour, he might not be risen, and so the faith of Christians was vain. So that they represent the Apostles as absurd as is possible, *viz.* going about to perswade men out of their senses by virtue of an argument, the whole strength whereof depends upon the certainty of sense.

And now the matter is brought to a fair issue; If the testimony of sense be to be relied upon, then *Transubstantiation* is false; If it be not, then no man is sure that Christianity is true. For the utmost assurance that the Apostles had of the truth of Christianity, was the testimony of their own senses concerning our Saviour's miracles, and this testimony every man hath against *Transubstantiation.* From whence it plainly follows, that no man (no not the Apostles themselves) had more reason to believe *Christianity* to be true, than every man hath to believe *Transubstantiation* to be false. And we who did not see our Saviour's Miracles (as the Apostles did) and have only a credible relation of them, but do see the *Sacrament*, have

have less evidence of the *truth of Christianity* than of the *falshood* of *Transubstantiation.*

But cannot God impose upon the senses of men, and represent things to them otherwise than they are? Yes, undoubtedly. And if he hath revealed that he doth this, are we not to believe him? Most certainly. But then we ought to be assured that he hath made such a Revelation; which *Assurance* no man can have, the certainty of sense being taken away.

I shall press the business a little farther. Supposing the Scripture to be a *Divine Revelation*, and that these words (*This is my Body*) if they be in Scripture, must necessarily be taken in the strict and literal sense; I ask now, What greater evidence any man has that these words (*This is my Body*) are in the Bible, than every man has that the bread is not chang'd in the Sacrament? Nay no man has so much; for we have only the evidence of *one* sense that these words are in the Bible, but that the Bread is not chang'd we have the concurring testimony of *several* of our senses. In a word, if this be once admitted that the senses of all men are deceiv'd in one of the most plain sensible matters that can be, there is no certain means left either to convey or prove a *Divine Revelation* to men; nor is there any way to confute the grossest impostures in the World: For if the clear evidence of all mens senses be not sufficient for this purpose, let any man, if he can, find a better and more convincing argument.

5. I will instance but in one *Doctrine* more; And that shall be, their *Doctrine* of *deposing Kings* in case of Heresie, and absolving their Subjects from their Allegiance to them. And this is not a meer *speculative Doctrine*, but hath been put in practice many a time by the Bishops of *Rome*, as every one knows that is vers'd in History. For the troubles and confusions which were occasioned by this very thing make up a good part of the History of several Ages.

I hope

I hope no body expects that I should take the pains to shew that this was not the Doctrine of our Saviour and his Apostles, nor of the Primitive Christians. The *Papists* are many of them so far from pretending this, that in some times and places, when it is not seasonable and for their purpose, we have much a-do to perswade them that ever it was their Doctrine. But if *Transubstantiation* be their Doctrine, *this* is; for they came both out of the same Forge, I mean the Council of *Lateran* under Pope *Innocent* the Third. And if (as they tell us) *Transubstantiation* was then establish'd, so was *this*. And indeed one would think they were Twins and brought forth at the same time, they are so like one another, both of them so monstrously unreasonable.

II. I come now in the *second* place to consider some *Practices* of the Church of *Rome*, which I am afraid will prove as bad as her *Doctrines*. I shall instance in these five.

1. Their celebrating of their Divine service in an *unknown Tongue*. And that not only contrary to the practice of the Primitive Church, and to the great end and design of Religious Worship, which is the Edification of those who are concerned in it, (and it is hard to imagine how men can be edified by what they do not understand) but likewise in direct Contradiction to St. *Paul*, who hath no less than a whole Chapter wherein he confutes this Practice as fully, and condemns it as plainly as any thing is condemned in the whole Bible. And they that can have the face to maintain that this Practice was not condemned by St. *Paul*, or that it was allowed and used in the first Ages of Christianity, need not be ashamed to set up for the defence of any Paradox in the World.

2. The Communion *in one kind*. And that notwithstanding that even by their own acknowledgment

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our Saviour instituted it in both kinds, and the Primitive Church administred it in both kinds. This I must acknowledge is no *addition* to Christianity, but a *sacrilegious taking away* of an essential part of the Sacrament. For the *Cup* is as essential a part of the Institution as the *Bread*; and they might as well, and by the same Authority, take away the one as the other, and both as well as either.

3. Their worshipping of *Images*. Which practice (notwithstanding all their Distinctions about it, which are no other but what the *Heathens* used in the same case) is as point-blank against the *second Commandment*, as a *deliberate* and *malicious killing* of a man is against the *sixth*. But if the case be so plain, a man would think that at least the Teachers and Guides of that Church should be sensible of it. Why, they are so, and afraid the people should be so too, and therefore in their ordinary *Catechisms*, and *Manuals* of Devotion they leave out the *second Commandment*, and divide the *tenth* into two to make up the number; lest if the common people should know it their Consciences should start at the doing of a thing so directly contrary to the plain command of God.

4. The worshipping of the *bread* and *wine* in the Eucharist, out of a false and groundless perswasion, *that they are substantially changed into the body and blood of Christ*. Which if it be not true (and it hath good fortune if it be, for certainly it is one of the most incredible things in the whole World) then by the confession of several of their own learned Writers, they are guilty of *gross Idolatry*.

5. The worship and invocation of *Saints* and *Angels*; and particularly of the Virgin *Mary*, which hath now for some Ages been a principal part of their Religion. Now a man may justly wonder that so considerable a part of Religion as they make this to be should have no manner of foundation in the Scripture.

Does

Does our Saviour any where speak one word concerning the worshippping of Her? Nay, does he not take all occasions to restrain all extravagant apprehensions and imaginations concerning honour due to Her, as foreseeing the degeneracy of the Church in this thing? When he was told that his Mother and Brethren were without; *Who* (says he) *are my mother and my brethren? He that doth the will of my Father, the same is my mother, and sister, and brother.* And when the Woman brake forth into that rapture concerning the blessed Mother of our Lord, *Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps that gave thee suck!* Our Saviour diverts to another thing, *Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it.* Does either our Saviour or his Apostles in all their particular precepts and directions concerning Prayer, and the manner of it, and by whom we are to address our selves to God, give the least intimation of praying to the Virgin *Mary*, or making use of her Mediation? And can any man believe, that if this had been the *practice* of the Church from the beginning, our *Saviour* and his Apostles would have been so silent about so considerable a part in Religion, insomuch that in all the Epistles of the Apostles I do not remember that her Name is so much as once mentioned? And yet the worship of her is at this day in the Church of *Rome*, and hath been for several Ages, a main part of their publick worship; yea, and of their private devotions too; in which it is usual with them to say *ten Ave Maries* for *one Pater Noster*; that is, for one Prayer they make to Almighty God, they make ten addresses to the blessed Virgin; for that is the proportion observed in their *Rosaries*. He that considers this, and had never seen the *Bible*, would have been apt to think that there had been more said concerning *Her* in Scripture, than either concerning *God*, or our blessed *Saviour*; and that the New Testament were full from

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one end to the other of precepts and exhortations to the worshipping of her; and yet when all is done, I challenge any man to shew me so much as one sentence in the whole Bible that sounds that way. And there is as little of the Christian Writers of the first three hundred years. The truth is, *this practice* began to creep in among some superstitious people about the middle of the *fourth Century*: And I remember particularly, that *Epiphanius* who lived about that time calls it the *Heresie of the Women*.

And thus have I given you some instances of several *Doctrines* and *practises* which the Church of *Rome* have built upon the foundation of *Christianity*. Much more might have been said of them, but from what hath been said any man may easily discern how dangerous they are to the salvation of men.

I proceed now in the second place,

II. To consider, whether our granting a *possibility of salvation*, though with great hazard, to those in the Communion of the *Roman* Church, and their denying it to us, be a sufficient argument and encouragement to any man to quit our Church and go to theirs. And there is the more need to consider this, because this is the great *popular argument* wherewith the *emissaries* and *agents* of that Church are wont to assault our people. *Your Church* (say they) *grants that a* Papist *may be saved*; *Ours denies that a* Protestant *can be saved*; *therefore it is safest to be of our Church, in which salvation by the acknowledgement of both sides is possible.*

For answer to this I shall endeavour to shew, that this is so far from being a *good argument*, that it is so intollerable *weak* and *sophistical*, that any considerate man ought to be ashamed to be catched by it. For either it is good of it self and sufficient to perswade a man to relinquish our Church, and to pass over to theirs,

theirs, without entring into the merits of the cause on either side, and without comparing the Doctrines and Practices of both the Churches together, or it is not. If it be not sufficient *of it self* to perswade a man to leave our Church, without comparing the Doctrines on both sides, then it is to no purpose, and there is nothing got by it. For if upon examination and comparing of Doctrines the one appear to be *true* and the other *false*, this alone is a sufficient inducement to any man to cleave to that Church where the true Doctrine is found; and then there is no need of this argument.

If it be said, that this argument is good in it self without the examination of the Doctrines of both Churches; this seems a very strange thing for any man to affirm, *That it is reason enough to a man to be of any Church, whatever her Doctrines and Practices be, if she do but damn those that differ from her, and if the Church that differs from her do but allow a possibility of salvation in her Communion.*

But they who use this *argument*, pretend that it is sufficient of it self; and therefore I shall apply my self to shew, as briefly and plainly as I can, the miserable *weakness* and *insufficiency* of it to satisfie any mans conscience or prudence to change his Religion. And to this end I shall,

1. Shew the weakness of the *principle* upon which this *argument* relies.

2. Give some *parallel instances* by which it will appear that it concludes false.

3. I shall take notice of some *gross absurdities* that follow from it.

4. Shew how unfit it is to work upon those to whom it is propounded. And,

5. How improper it is to be urged by those that make use of it.

I. I shall shew the *weakness* of the *principle* upon which this *argument* relies; And that is this, *That whatever*

whatever different parties in Religion agree in, is safest to be chosen. The true consequence of which *principle* if it be driven to the head, is to perswade men to forsake Christianity, and to make them take up in the principles of *natural Religion*, for in these all Religions do agree. For if this *principle* be true, and signifie any thing, it is dangerous to embrace any thing wherein the several parties in Religion differ; because that only is safe and prudent to be chosen wherein all agree. So that this *argument*, if the foundation of it be good, will perswade further than those who make use of it desire it should do; for it will not only make men forsake the *Protestant Religion*, but *Popery* too; and which is much more considerable, *Christianity* it self

II. I will give some *parallel instances* by which it will clearly be seen that this argument concludes false. The *Donatists* denyed the Baptism of the *Catholicks* to be good, but the *Catholicks* acknowledged the Baptism of the *Donatists* to be valid. So that both sides were agreed that the Baptism of the *Donatists* was good, therefore the safest way for St. *Austin* and other *Catholicks* (according to this *argument*) was to be Baptized again by the *Donatists*, because by the acknowledgement of both sides Baptism among them was valid.

But to come nearer to the Church of *Rome*. Several in that Church hold *the personal Infallibility of the Pope and the lawfulness of deposing and killing Kings for Heresie* to be *de fide*, that is, necessary Articles of Faith, and consequently, and whoever does not believe them cannot be saved. But a great many *Papists*, though they believe these things to be no matters of Faith, yet they think those that hold them may be saved, and they are generally very favourable towards them. But now, according to this *argument*, they ought all to be of their opinion in these points, because both sides are agreed that *they that hold them may be*

saved; but one side positively says, that *men cannot be saved if they do not hold them.*

But my Text furnisheth me with as good an instance to this purpose as can be desired. St. *Paul* here in the Text acknowledgeth the *possibility* of the *salvation* of those *who built hay and stubble upon the foundation of Christianity*; *that they might be saved*, though with great difficulty, and as it were *out of the fire.* But now among those builders with hay and stubble there were those who denyed the possiblity of St. *Paul*'s Salvation, and of those who were of his mind. We are told of some who built the *Jewish* Ceremonies and Observances upon the foundation of Christianity, and said, that unless men were Circumcised, and kept the law of *Moses*, they could not be saved. So that by this argument St. *Paul* and his followers ought to have gone over to these *Judaizing Christians*, because it was acknowledged on both sides that they might be saved. But those *Judaizing Christians* were as uncharitable to St *Paul* and other Christians as the Church of *Rome* is now to us, for they said positively *that they could not be saved* But can any man think that St. *Paul* would have been moved by this argument, to leave a safe and certain way of salvation for that which was only possible, and that with great difficulty and hazard? The argument you see is the very same, and yet it concludes the wrong way; which plainly shews that it is a *contingent argument*, and concludes uncertainly and by chance, and therefore no man ought to be moved by it.

III. I shall take notice of some *gross absurdities* that follow from it. I shall mention but these two.

1. According to this *principle* it is always safest to be on the *uncharitable side.* And yet uncharitableness is as bad an evidence, either of a true Christian, or a true Church, as a man would wish. *Charity* is one of the most essential marks of Christianity, and what the Apostle

Apoſtle ſaith of particular Chriſtians is as true of whole Churches, that *though thay have all Faith, yet if they have not Charity they are nothing.*

I grant that no Charity teacheth men to ſee others pamned, and not to tell them the danger of their condition. But it is to be conſidered that the damning of men is a very hard thing, and therefore whenever we do it the caſe muſt be wonderfully plain. And is it ſo in this matter? They of the Church of *Rome* cannot deny but that we embrace all the Doctrines of our Saviour, contained in the Apoſtles Creed, and determined by the four firſt General Councils: And yet they will not allow this and a good life to put us within a poſſibility of ſalvation, becauſe we will not ſubmit to all the innovations they would impoſe upon us. And yet I think there is ſcarce any *Doctrine* or *practice* in difference between them and us, which ſome or other of their moſt learned Writers have not acknowledged either not to be ſufficiently contained in Scripture, or not to have been held and practiſed by the primitive Church: ſo that nothing can excuſe their uncharitableneſs towards us. And they pay dear for the little advantage they get by this *argument*, for they do what in them lies to make themſelves no Chriſtians, that they may prove themſelves the truer and more Chriſtian Church; a *medium* which we do not deſire to make uſe of.

2. If this *argument* were good, then by this trick a man may bring over all the world to agree with him in an error which another does not account damnable, whatever it be, provided he do but damn all thoſe that do not hold it; and there wants nothing but *confidence* and *uncharitableneſs* to do this. But is there any ſenſe, that another mans boldneſs and want of Charity ſhould be an argument to move me to be of his Opinion? I cannot illuſtrate this better, than by the difference between a skilful Phyſician and a

Mountebank. A *learned* and *skilful Physician* is modest, and speaks justly of things: He says, that such a method of cure which he hath directed is safe, and withal, that that which the *Mountebank* prescribes may possibly do the work, but there is great hazard and danger in it: But the *Mountebank*, who never talks of any thing less than *infallible cures*, (and always the more *Mountebank*, the stronger pretence to *infallibility*) he is *positive* that that method which the *Physician* prescribes will destroy the Patient, but his receipt is infallible and never fails. Is there any reason in this case, that this man should carry it meerly by his *confidence?* And yet if this *argument* be good, the safest way is to reject the *Physicians* advice and to stick to the *Mountebank*'s. For both sides are agreed, that there is a possibility of cure in the *Mountebank*'s method, but not in the *Physician*'s; and so the whole force of the argument lies in the *confidence* of an *ignorant man.*

IV. This *argument* is very unfit to work upon *those* to whom it is propounded: For either they believe we say true in this, or not. If they think we do not, they have no reason to be moved by what we say. If they think we do, why do they not take in all that we say in this matter? Namely, that though it be possible for some in the Communion of the *Roman* Church to be saved, yet it is very hazardous; and that they are in a safe condition already in our Church. And why then should a *bare possibility*, accompanyed with infinite and apparent hazard, be an argument to any man to run into that danger?

Lastly, this *argument* is very improper to be urged by those who make use of it. Half of the strength of it lies in this, that we *Protestants* acknowledge that *it is possible a* Papist *may be saved.* But why should they lay any stress upon this? What matter is it what we Hereticks say, who are so damnably mistaken in all

all other things? Methinks, if there were no other reason, yet because we say it, it should seem to them to be unlikely to be true. But I perceive when it serves for their purpose we have some little credit and authority among them.

By this time I hope every one is in some measure satisfied of the *weakness of this argument*, which is so transparent that no wise man can honestly use it, and he must have a very odd understanding that can be cheated by it. The truth is, it is a *casual and contingent arguiment*, and sometimes it concludes right, and oftner wrong; and therefore no prudent man can be moved by it, except only in one case, when all things are so equal on both sides that there is nothing else in the whole world to determine him, which surely can never happen in matters of Religion necessary to be believed. No man is so weak, as not to consider in the change of his Religion the *merits* of the *cause it self*; as not to examine the *Doctrines* and *Practices* of the Churches on both sides; and not to take notice of the *confidence* and *charity* of both Parties, together with all other things which ought to move a conscientious and prudent man: And if upon enquiry there appear to be a clear advantage on either side, then this *argument* is needless and comes too late, because the work is already done without it.

Besides, that the great hazard of Salvation in the *Roman* Church (which we declare upon account of the *Doctrines* and *practices* which I have mentioned) ought to deter any man much more from that Religion, than the acknowledged possibility of salvation in it ought to encourage any man to the embracing of it; Never did any Christian Church build so much *hay* and *stubble* upon the *foundation* of Christianity, and therefore *those that are saved in it must be saved*, as it were, *out of the fire*. And though *Purgatory* be not meant in the Text, yet it is a Doctrine very well suited

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to their manner of building; for there is need of an *ignis purgatorius*, of a *fire* to try their work what it is, and to *burn* up their *hay* and *stubble*. And I have so much Charity (and I desire always to have it) as to hope, that a great many among them who live piously, and have been almost inevitably detain'd in that Church by the prejudice of education, and an invisible ignorance, will upon a *general repentance* find mercy with God; *and though their work suffer loss and be burnt*, yet *they themselves may escape, as out of the fire*. But as for those who had the opportunities of coming to the knowledge of the truth, if they continue in the errours of that Church, or apostatize from the truth, I think their condition so far from being safe, that there must be extraordinary favourable circumstances in their case to give a man hopes of their salvation.

I have now done with the *two* things I propounded to speak to. And I am sorry that the *necessary defence* of our Religion, against the *restless importunities* and *attempts* of our adversaries upon all sorts of persons, hath engaged me to spend so much time in matters of dispute, which I had much rather have employed in another way. Many of you can be my witnesses that I have constantly made it my business, in this great Presence and Assembly to plead against the *impieties* and *wickedness* of men, and have endeavoured by the best arguments I could think of, to gain men over to a *firm belief* and serious *practice* of the main things of Religion. And, I do assure you, I had much rather perswade any one to be a good man, than to be of any part or denomination of Christians whatsoever. For I doubt not, but the *belief of the ancient Creed*, provided we entertain nothing that is destructive of it, *together with a good life, will certainly save a man*; and without this no man can have reasonable hopes of salvation, no nor

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an infallible Church, if there were any such to be found in the world.

I have been, according to my opportunities, not a negligent observer of the *genius* and humour of the several Sects and Professions in Religion. And upon the whole matter, I do in my conscience believe the Church of *England* to be the best constituted Church this day in the world; and that, as to the main, the *Doctrine* and *Government*, and *Worship* of it, are excellently framed to make men *soberly Religious*: Securing men on the one hand, from the wild freaks of *Enthusiasm*; and on the other, from the gross follies of *Superstition*. And our Church hath this peculiar advantage above several Professions that we know in the world, that it acknowledgeth a due and just subordination to the *civil Authority*, and hath always been untainted in its *loyalty*.

And now shall every trifling consideration be sufficient to move a man to relinquish such a Church? There is no greater disparagement to a mans understanding, no greater argument of a light and ungenerous mind, than rashly to change ones Religion. *Religion* is our greatest concernment of all other, and it is not every *little argument*, no, nor a great noise about *infallibility*, nothing but very *plain* and *convincing evidence*, that should sway a man in this case. But they are utterly inexcusable, who make a change of such concernment upon the insinuations of one side only, without ever hearing what can be said for the Church they were baptized and brought up in before they leave it. They that can yield thus easily to the impressions of every one that hath a design and interest to make *Proselytes*, may at this rate of discretion change their *Religion* twice a day, and instead of *morning* and *evening Prayer*, they may have a *morning* and *evening Religion*.

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Therefore for God's sake, and for our own Soul's sake, and for the sake of our Reputation, let us consider and *shew our selves men*; let us not suffer our selves to be shaken and carryed away with every wind. Let us not run our selves into danger when we may be safe. Let us stick to the *foundation of Religion*, the *Articles* of our *common belief*, and build upon them gold, and silver, and precious stones, I mean, the *vertues and actions of a good life*; and if we would do this, we should not be apt to set such a value upon *hay* and *stubble*. If we would sincerely endeavour to live *holy and vertuous lives*, we should not need to cast about for a *Religion* which may furnish us with ease and indirect ways to get to Heaven.

I will conclude all with the Apostle's Exhortation, *Wherefore my beloved Brethren be ye stedfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.*

Now the God of peace which brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the Sheep, by the blood of the everlasting Covenant, make you perfect in every good work, to do his will; working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be Glory for ever and ever. Amen.

FINIS.

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